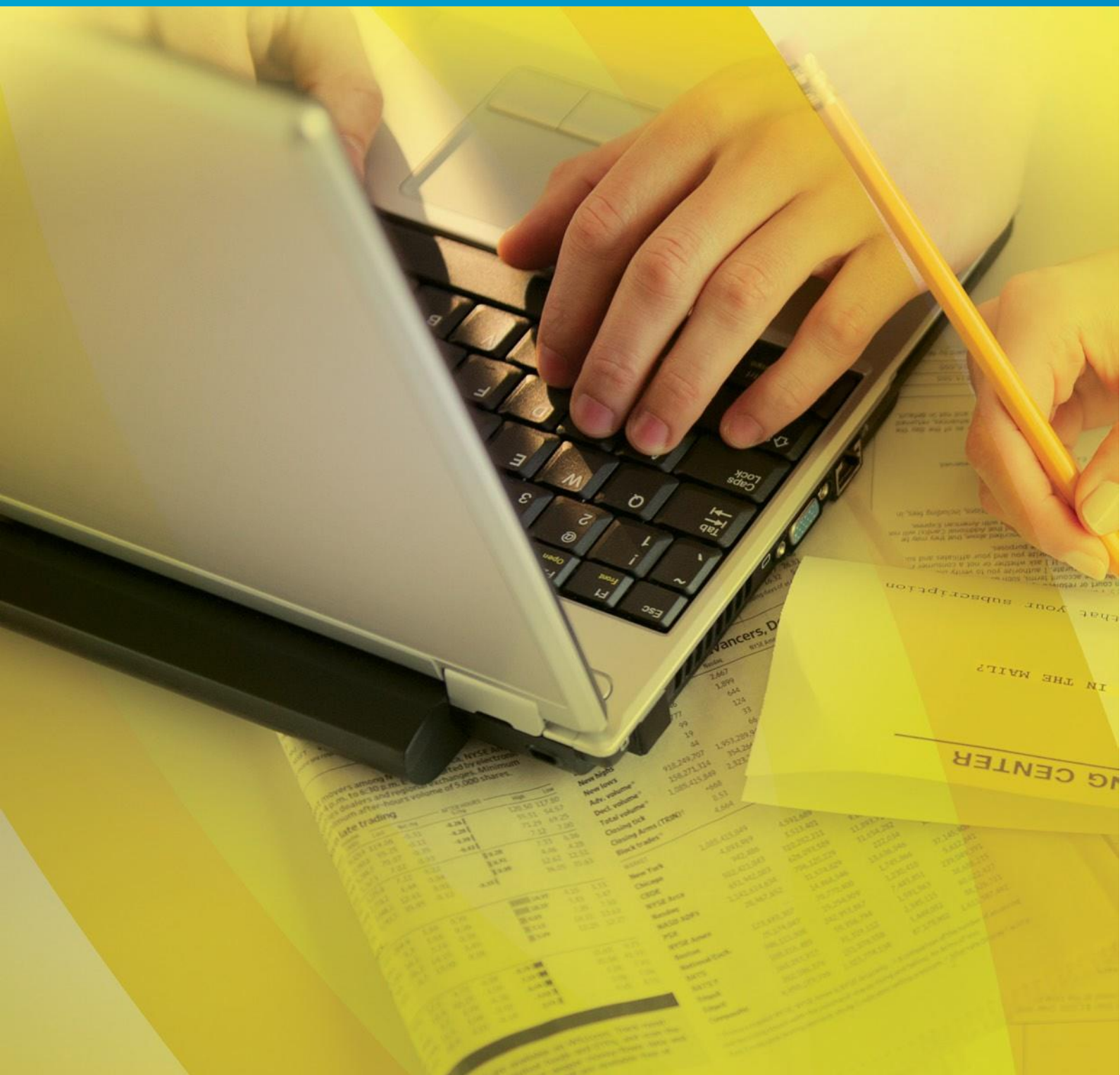


Your Billing Rights with Electricity & Gas Retailers



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The information on these pages will help you understand:

Some of the reasons for a high energy bill and

What you can do about it...

- how to reduce your bill
- reasons for unexpectedly high bills
- what to do if you're having trouble paying your bill
- complaints and resolving disputes.

Your energy retailer is the company that sends you your electricity or gas bill.

The Energy Retail Code specifies the rules and regulations that your energy retailer must follow in supplying your electricity and gas. The Code applies to:

- all domestic consumers and
- small business consumers who consume less than 40MWh of electricity or less than 1000GJ of gas per year.

How to reduce your energy bill

In Victoria there are many licensed energy retailers offering a range of energy contracts and plans.

Their role is to sell you power and bill you for your energy usage.

You can choose your energy retailer. Buying electricity from a choice of retailers enables you to choose the price and service that is best for you.

If you are unhappy with the prices charged by your energy retailer, shop around for a new contract.

If you have never moved premises or signed a contract with an energy retailer, you are likely to be on a standing contract, probably paying higher prices and missing out on discounts. (If you are still living in the same house since 2001 and you have never started another contract for electricity or gas, you will still be on the old contract that was standing back then. This is the standing contract).

Market contracts can offer you better value for money. Most customers are on a market contract. Moving to a market contract, with your existing retailer or with a new retailer, will not affect the reliability or quality of your energy supply. If you change your mind, you have a ten business day 'cooling-off' period to cancel the contract. (Market contracts are the offers that energy retailers advertise. They may offer you a better price (or some other benefit). They can be a long contract (up to three years) or can be on-going. You must agree to the price and other parts of the contract before it states. Prices are set by your retailer, not the government).

There are a number of pricing tariff structures that are available to consumers in Victoria, including:

- **Single rate:** Single rate are subject to the same price at all times.
- **Two rate:** Two rate tariffs typically provide the same price at all times, but with a special off-peak rate which is typically applied to heating of hot water, but not to other off-peak usage.
- **Time of use:** Time of use tariffs generally offer different rates for all usage, depending on the time of day that the usage occurs. Typically these tariffs have a peak rate (usually weekdays and evenings) and off peak rate (usually nights and weekends).
- **Flexible tariffs:** Flexible pricing is the different price rates for different times during the day. For more information about flexible pricing, including an example of a flexible pricing plan, go to the My Power Planner tool at the Victorian Government's Switch On website (www.mpp.switchon.vic.gov.au).

The range of tariffs available may be limited because of a number of factors, including meter and network configuration. Not all tariffs are available at all premises.

How to reduce your energy bill

Before choosing your energy retailer:

- decide what is important for you: price, green energy, service or special offers.
- determine how much you paid for electricity and gas over the last 12 months.

When choosing, make sure you understand the offer and the contract's terms and conditions. Compare:

- the supply charge, which is a fixed daily amount, regardless of your energy usage.
- the price (tariff) you are paying for energy (how many cents per kWh or MJ).
- discounts on offer (e.g. 10% off for paying bills on time) and what the discount applies to.
- other incentives on offer (e.g. shop credits, movie tickets, sporting club memberships).
- the length of the contract and payment options (eg direct debit, BPay, Centrepay, monthly billing).
- price increase terms and whether you can fix the price for a certain period (often called a rate freeze, e.g. for 12 months).
- any fees (including any exit fees or early termination fees) or incentive payback terms.
- any fees for a paper bill or credit card payments.



You could be paying higher prices for energy and missing out on discounts. Shopping around can save you money.

Reasons for an unexpectedly high energy bill

Some of the reasons you might receive an unexpected high energy bill include:

Price increases

Your energy retailer may have increased their price for energy usage during a billing cycle.

Back-billing

Where your bill may include charges for more than one billing cycle (e.g. 6 months instead of 3 months) or you may have been undercharged for the energy you used and are now being charged for the amounts owing.

Concessions

Your concessions may not have been applied.

Discounts

Discounts which you are entitled to under your energy plan may not have been applied.

Estimated versus actual reading

If your previous bill is based on an estimated reading and you used more energy than estimated, you will be charged for the extra energy used, once the meter is able to be read.

Increase in your energy usage

You may have used more energy than in previous billing cycles.

Prices may increase during a billing cycle

Your energy retailer can increase prices during a billing cycle, charging you amounts on both the old and new rate (this is often referred to as pro-rata). Any old and new rates must be shown separately on your bill.

If you are on a standing contract, under the Energy Retail Code, energy retailers can choose to increase their prices every six months. Unless you are billed monthly, this means you could see a price rise on every second electricity bill or every third gas bill.

If you are on a market contract, prices can change at any time unless the price is locked in for the length of the contract.

A retailer is required to provide you with notice of the price change as soon as practicable, and no later than your next bill.



Your energy retailer must notify you of any price increases as soon as practicable, and no later than your next bill.

Reasons for an unexpectedly high energy bill

Back-billing

One of the reasons for unexpected high bills is back-billing.

Common reasons for back-billing are:

Delayed bills

When there is a problem with your energy retailer's billing system and there is a delay in issuing your bill. When you receive your next bill it could be for more than one billing cycle (e.g. six months instead of three months).

Undercharging

You were previously undercharged for your energy usage and your energy retailer is now asking for the balance of amounts owed.

Unpaid amounts

If you have not paid a previous bill or a payment is not received by your energy retailer, owed amounts will be added to your next bill.

The Energy Retail Code states that your energy retailer:

- must list all back-billed amounts and explain what they are
- must give you extra time to pay any undercharged or previously unbilled amounts (e.g. if the period you are being back-billed for is three months, you must be given an extra three months to pay this amount)
- cannot charge you any interest on back-billed amounts.

For delayed bills and undercharging, if the delay or undercharging was your fault, either through an unlawful act or through not providing safe, convenient and unhindered access to your meter, then no time limit applies to the amount your energy retailer can charge.

If it is your energy retailer's fault, the Energy Retail Code states that:

Your energy retailer can only charge you for unpaid amounts within the previous nine months. This means you do not have to pay any amounts owed outside the nine month period.



If it is your energy retailer's fault, there are time limits for how long you can be back-billed.

You must be given extra time to pay any back-billed amounts.

Reasons for an unexpectedly high energy bill

Concessions have not been included

Billing system errors or outdated information may mean concessions you are entitled to have not been included on your bill. If you are a concession card holder, check to make sure your concessions have been listed and deducted. Call your energy retailer to make sure they have your correct concession details.

Discounts have not been applied

If, as part of your contract, you receive a discount for paying a bill on time (e.g. 10%) but don't pay the bill by the due date, you lose the discount and your next bill will be higher.

There may also be other discounts that have not been applied. Check your contract or plan to make sure you are receiving everything you are entitled to.

Estimated versus actual reading

Bill amounts can fluctuate, depending on whether your bill is based on an estimate of your average usage or an actual reading of your meter.

The Energy Retail Code specifies that meters must be read at least once every 12 months. Old style meters are read every three months for electricity and every two months for gas.

If your meter has not been read, your bill will show the word 'Estimated' or 'E' beside the meter readings.

Even though some bills are estimates, eventually you only pay for the energy you use. Once your meter is read, your next bill will be adjusted to reflect the actual reading. If you used more energy than the estimate, you will need to pay for it. If you used less energy, you will be refunded the difference.

A smart meter regularly reads your usage and data is automatically sent to your energy retailer. If you have recently had a smart meter installed, your first bill after installation may be higher because it is based on actual usage and not an estimate.



Make sure your concessions and discounts have been included in your bill.

Reasons for an unexpectedly high energy bill

Changes to your usage

A bill can also be higher because of changes in your household or the way you use energy. This includes seasonal usage (e.g. air-conditioning in summer, heating in winter), more people in the house (e.g. guests, being home more), or during renovations.

Appliances can also contribute to bill increases. New, old or inefficient appliances may use more gas or electricity.

To monitor and improve usage patterns, check your previous bills. Under the Energy Retail Code you can request historical billing data from your energy retailer.

They cannot charge you a fee if you are requesting this data for the first time.

On request, energy retailers are required to provide energy efficiency advice to domestic customers. Most energy retailers have useful energy saving tips and advice on their websites.

The Victorian Government's Switch On website (www.switchon.vic.gov.au) also offers advice, tools and tips to take charge of your power bill.



You can request historical billing data from your energy retailer. Get advice, tools and tips to take charge of your power bill at the Victorian Government's Switch On website.

Having trouble paying your bill?

Contact your energy retailer as soon as possible

You must contact your energy retailer if you cannot pay your bill by the due date. Let them know as soon as possible or it could cost you money later on. This may include disconnection and reconnection fees.

What your energy retailer must offer if you can't pay

Under the Energy Retail Code your energy retailer must assess your capacity to pay and try to agree on a payment arrangement. They cannot disconnect your energy supply without giving you an opportunity to pay.

A payment arrangement could be:

Extension of time

You are given more time to pay (e.g. an extra 14 days).

Payment by instalments

If you are experiencing difficulty, or believe you are likely to experience difficulty paying your bills, you can ask your retailer to place you on an Instalment Plan. The Plan will allow you to make payments in advance towards the next bill, while also allowing you to pay any amount owing. Instalment Plans must be based on what you are able to pay.

Hardship plan

If your issues are longer-term, all energy retailers must have hardship policies and payment plans, including advice on government assistance. Ask for details.

Having trouble paying your bill?

In assessing your capacity to pay, your energy retailer must consider conducting an energy efficiency audit (review) of your home.

On request, your energy retailer must give you information on all eligible rebates and concessions, including the Utility Relief Grant Scheme. You can also check to see if you are eligible for rebates or concessions by contacting the Concession Information Line at the Department of Human Services (1800 658 521) or by visiting their website, www.dhs.vic.gov.au

Remember, if you have trouble paying a bill, contact your energy retailer. If you are on a direct debit arrangement, your energy retailer will automatically take the full amount on the agreed direct debit date unless you notify them. If the funds are not available you are likely to be charged a default by both your retailer and your bank.

For further advice on how to manage your energy bill contact Moneyhelp on 1800 007 007. Moneyhelp provides confidential and free financial information to assist Victorians with managing debt, bills and ongoing expenses.

Request a shorter billing cycle

Under the Energy Retail Code you have the right to negotiate a shorter billing cycle (i.e. less than three months). This may assist your budgeting and enable you to pay your energy bill in smaller amounts. You may request bills be sent to you monthly.

Contact your energy retailer to request a shorter billing cycle and discuss if there are any additional fees for receiving your bill more often. Be sure to check the terms and conditions of these arrangements.



If you have trouble paying, your energy retailer must offer you a payment arrangement. You have the right to ask for your bill to arrive more often (e.g. monthly).

Solar power

How do I get solar power?

Many companies install solar power systems, including some electricity retailers. It is worth comparing quotes from different suppliers, and any extra costs, such as surcharges for two storey houses, panel mounting frames and hardware for your type of roof. It is also worth checking whether the solar PV installer will liaise with your electricity retailer and distributor to ensure that you have the right type of meter and that you will receive a feed in tariff for your excess power.

How much electricity will I generate?

The amount of electricity that you generate depends on the size of your system, which way it is facing, whether there is any shading from trees or other buildings and the local climatic conditions. In Melbourne, a typical average generation is up to 3.7 kWh per day for a 1 kW system (up to 5.5 kWh per day for a 1.5 kW system). In winter months the average daily generation is typically less than 3 kWh and in summer months it is typically greater than 5 kWh for a 1 kW system. For comparison, the average household uses up to 18 kWh daily, but an energy efficient house can use much less.

Will I generate enough to sell power back to the grid?

In most cases there will be times that the solar PV system is generating more power than your house is using. At these times you will be selling power back to the grid.

At these times (usually during a sunny day) you may be able to reduce your energy bills by using some appliances, such as washing machines and dishwashers, and therefore minimising your usage during the times when you are not generating as much or any power.

Your solar power system will reduce the amount of power you need to buy from the grid, but the amount that you will save will vary on your usage pattern. Be wary of claims that you will never need to pay a bill again or can eliminate your electricity bills. Most customers are installing systems in the 1.5 to 2 kW range, and these are unlikely to be large enough to negate your electricity bill.

Feed in tariffs

The feed in tariff is the rate you get per kWh of excess electricity you feed into the grid. The feed-in tariff currently available offers a minimum of 6.2 cents per kWh for 2015 for excess electricity fed back into the grid. Some electricity retailers may offer a higher rate but are not obligated to do so.

Solar power

When I get solar power do I have to enter a new contract with my electricity retailer for the electricity I buy?

Not necessarily. You will need to enter into a new contract to sell your excess electricity, but the electricity you buy might be under the same contract as previously or your retailer may require you to enter into a new contract. You should discuss this issue with your retailer before committing to solar power. It's a good idea to shop around to make sure you get the contract you want.

Will the tariff I pay for electricity change?

Not necessarily, this depends on the retailer. Your usage tariff to buy electricity might be the same as previously, or your retailer may offer a different tariff. The tariff structure may also change in regard to peak and off peak tariffs. For the majority of people, this may not significantly impact their overall annual bill. Whether a customer is better or worse off will depend on their energy use pattern. Some retailers might only offer a flat rate once you have solar power. Others might switch you from a flat tariff to a peak and off-peak tariff. You should discuss this issue with your retailer before committing to solar power. It is advisable to shop around to make sure you get the tariff structure that you want.

Will my electricity bills decrease once I have solar power?

In many cases, solar power will help reduce your electricity bills by firstly, reducing the amount of power you buy from the grid and secondly, through the feed in tariff you receive for excess power you sell to the grid. However, in some cases, you may be financially better off without solar power. This can occur if your retailer offers a particular tariff structure for solar power that does not suit you. For example, if you currently have peak and off-peak rates, and your retailer only offers a flat rate if you get solar power, you will lose the off-peak rate and may be worse off, despite the power your solar system generates.

If your retailer wants to move you to a Time Of Use tariff, you could be better or worse off, depending on your energy use pattern. You should check with your retailer about the tariff they will charge when you have solar power, and whether any existing discounts will continue. It can also be worth shopping around for deals from other retailers that may suit you better.

Will my electricity bill show the same information after I get solar power?

Once your solar power system is installed and your meter is recording it, your electricity bill will include extra information. Without solar power, your electricity bill shows the total amount of electricity used by your house. When you have solar power, your bill will show how much electricity you imported and how much you exported. Your bill will not show you how much electricity your house actually used or how much electricity your solar power system generated. This is because under net metering, only the import and export of electricity to the grid is measured.



More information on solar power and feed-in-tariffs is available at www.energyandresources.vic.gov.au

Complaints and resolving disputes

There are some simple steps you should follow for energy complaints and disputes.

Step 1 Understand your issue

Step 2 Contact your energy retailer

Step 3 If you are not satisfied with the outcome, contact the Energy and Water Ombudsman Victoria

Understand your issue

Part of understanding your issue is to understand the content of your bill. Most energy retailers have information about understanding your bill on their websites, including a sample bill with explanations.

Read the information on this website and information provided by your energy retailer before contacting them so you are better informed to discuss the issue(s).

Under the Energy Retail Code, your energy retailer must include certain information on your bill so you can easily verify that the bill conforms to your energy contract. This may include a graph, meter readings and charges.

There are two charges for energy:

Supply charge

A fixed daily charge that includes the cost of transporting energy to you through gas pipes or poles and wires.

Usage charge (also known as the tariff)

The cost of the actual energy you use.

A kilowatt hour (kWh) is the unit that measures your usage. 1000 watts for one hour = 1 kilowatt hour.

The price you pay for usage is displayed in decimal dollars.

For example: 392 kWh @ \$0.2658. This means 392 kWh were consumed at 26.58 cents per kWh. (Move the decimal point two numbers to the right).

Gas is measured in megajoules (MJ) and the tariff works the same way as for electricity.

Under the Energy Retail Code, your energy retailer must review your bill at your request. During the review, you must pay (whichever is lower):

- the portion of the bill that both you and your energy retailer agree is not in dispute

OR

- an average amount of your bills over the past 12 months. Add up all your bills in the past 12 months and divide by the number of billing cycles (e.g. divide by four billing cycles for electricity, divide by six billing cycles for gas).

If you ignore the bill and don't make any payment, your energy retailer is entitled to start proceedings to disconnect your energy supply. Contact your energy retailer if you are having trouble paying.



Most energy retailers provide a sample bill with explanations on their websites. Your energy retailer must review your bill at your request.

Complaints and resolving disputes

Always contact your energy retailer

Your energy retailer is your first contact point for any energy complaint or dispute.

Prepare before you call your retailer. Have your bill in front of you and highlight important information. Be clear about what you need to find out or want to resolve. Determine what you can and can't pay or what the disputed amounts are.

All energy retailers must take your complaint seriously and handle it in accordance with Australian Standards.

If you are not satisfied with the way your complaint is being handled, ask to speak to a manager. Under the Energy Retail Code you have the right to raise the complaint to a higher level within the retailer's management. You can also choose to put your complaint in writing, addressed to management.

Keep records of conversations and copies of any written correspondence (dates, times and outcomes). This will be useful if you choose to take the complaint further with the Energy and Water Ombudsman Victoria (EWOV).

Not satisfied?

Lodge a complaint with the Energy and Water Ombudsman Victoria

If you are dissatisfied with the way your energy retailer has handled your complaint or their response, you have the right to refer your complaint to EWOV.



Your energy retailer is your first contact point for any energy complaint or dispute. Ask to speak to a manager if you are not happy with the way your complaint is being handled.

Case studies

Customer finds out she is being billed monthly

Margaret used to receive her electricity bill once every three months but noticed that over the past five months she has been receiving a bill every month.

Margaret doesn't mind paying her bill monthly, but wants to know if her retailer can change the billing cycle.

Customer's rights

Margaret's retailer can change the billing cycle.

However, her retailer is required to get Margaret's explicit informed consent before placing her on a monthly billing cycle. This is a requirement under clause 24 of the Energy Retail Code.

What can customers do in this scenario?

1. Check whether you have given explicit informed consent to the change in the billing cycle.

Check the terms and conditions of your contract with your retailer. Your explicit informed consent to changes in billing cycle may have been provided when you signed the contract.

2. If you are sure you did not provide consent to a different billing cycle, call your retailer. A phone call may be all that is required to resolve your problem.

Tips

- Clearly explain the problem and remain polite throughout the conversation.
- Take notes of the call, including the date and the name of the customer service staff.

3. If the complaint is not resolved to your satisfaction, ask to speak to a senior staff member, such as the manager, or write to the retailer, addressing the letter to a senior manager.

4. If you're not satisfied with the retailer's response, contact the Energy and Water Ombudsman, Victoria (EWOV). They can be contacted by:

- phone on 1800 500 509
- email at ewovinfo@ewov.com.au
- mail to Reply Paid 469, MELBOURNE VIC 8060
- using EWOV's complaints form at www.ewov.com.au

Useful Information

- **EWOV is a free and independent dispute resolution body which can investigate:**
 - billing disputes
 - the retailer's administration of credit and payment services in relation to a particular customer
 - complaints related to disconnection, restriction and refundable advances.
- **EWOV cannot investigate complaints about:**
 - prices, tariffs or the pricing structure
 - Government policies, legislation, licences and codes.

More information about EWOV can be found at www.ewov.com.au

Case Studies

A consumer is called early in the morning by a retail salesperson

John was about to leave for work at 9.05 in the morning when he received a phone call from a retail telesales person who tried to convince him to change retailers.

John was annoyed that he got to work late because of the phone call and wanted to know if retailers' telesales staff can call him in the morning. He thought it was too early.

Customer's rights

Yes, retailers' sales staff can call you at that time of the morning.

Under the Australian Consumer Law, salespeople can:

- come to your door between:
 - 9.00 am and 6.00 pm Monday to Friday and
 - 9.00 am and 5.00 pm Saturday
- call you between:
 - 9.00 am and 8.00 pm Monday to Friday and
 - 9.00 am and 5.00 pm Saturday.

However, salespeople cannot contact you at any time on Sundays or public holidays.

Also, if you have a no canvassing sign displayed at your premise, such as 'do not knock', the Marketing Code of Conduct requires retailers' salespeople to abide by the sign.

What can consumers do if they are unhappy at being approached by a retailer's salesperson?

Unfortunately, there is no recourse for consumers if the salesperson contact during the allowed hours.

Only when contact occurs outside of the allowed hours can consumers complain to the retailer:

- Some retailers outsource their marketing activities and would not be aware of the salesperson's activities
- Only by complaining directly to the retailer will they know that their salespeople are not complying with the regulations and can take appropriate action against the salespeople

More Information

• Do Not Call Register

To avoid telemarketers, you can request to be added to the Federal Government's 'Do Not Call Register' online or by calling 1300 792 958

- **Consumer Affairs Victoria website** (consumer.vic.gov.au) has more information on telemarketing, as well as door-to-door sales.

Case studies

Customer saving money by changing usage profile

The Johnson family has installed solar panels. By changing the times of their electricity usage, they can reduce their electricity bills.

The Johnson family recently had 3kW solar panels installed on their property to help manage their electricity needs. They own a dishwasher, washing machine and a dryer.

How much electricity do these appliances use?

The Johnson family has a dishwasher that uses 1kWh per cycle, a washing machine which uses 1.2 kWh per cycle, and a dryer which uses 3kWh per cycle.

The Energy Rating Labelling Scheme is a mandatory scheme for a range of appliances, including dishwashers, washing machines and dryers. When offered for sale, these appliances must display a label that shows the star rating and other useful information about energy consumption. The label gives the appliances a star rating between one and ten stars. The greater the number of stars the higher the efficiency. It enables consumers to compare the energy efficiency of domestic appliances on a fair and equitable basis. It also provides incentive for manufacturers to improve the energy performance of appliances.

How can I reduce my bills further by changing my usage pattern?

While some of our electricity usage cannot be time-shifted (eg. refrigerators, lighting), other appliances can offer flexibility about when we use them.

The Johnson family pay a flat rate of 28 cents per kWh of electricity usage, and receive a feed in tariff from their energy retailer of 8 cents per kWh. With a 3kWh system, during the middle of the day, solar generation can be more than typical household usage, which would mean that at these times they would receive 6.2 cents for each kWh in excess of their usage, which is fed back into the grid.

Currently, the Johnson family use their dishwasher, washing machine and dryer in the evenings, when their solar generation is less than the overall household usage. This means that they pay 28 cents per kWh of usage at this time. If they were to shift the time that these appliances operate to when the solar generation is at its peak, this would cost them 8c per kWh which would have been received for the electricity which was being fed back into the grid. In effect, this can save them 20 cents per kWh of electricity usage.

How much can be saved by changing usage to peak solar generation times?

Over a period of a year, the Johnson family can achieve some significant savings by switching their use of appliances to peak solar generation hours (assuming appliance specifications as above).

Specifically:

- the daily use of a dishwasher at peak solar generation hours will save the family around \$73 per year
- the daily use of a washing machine at peak solar generation hours will save around \$88 per year
- the daily use of a clothes dryer used once a week will save around \$31 per year

You should be aware of the different factors that can affect these calculations, including:

- The energy efficiency ratings of your appliances
- Location (hours of sunshine)
- Weather (less generation on cloudy and rainy days)
- Seasons (less sunshine during winter than in summer)

What if I am not home during the peak generation times?

Many modern appliances have a timer function, which enables you to set up their cycles to commence at a time of your choosing. Check your user manual to see if your appliance has this functionality.

Case studies

Customer has not received a bill

Alan was last billed by his retailer in April 2013.

It is now April 2014 and Alan still has not received a bill. Alan wants to know whether he can do anything about this.

Customer's rights

The Energy Retail Code requires his retailer to bill all customers at least once every three months.

If Alan's retailer has not been able to bill him for a year, it may be because:

1. his retailer or distributor may be having issues with its billing system
2. the distributor's meter reader may have encountered problems getting access to read Alan's meter (Alan may have a locked gate or an aggressive dog on the property).

What can customers do in this scenario?

Step 1 Check that the meter was accessible to the meter reader:

- Where is the meter located?
- Was the gate to the property locked?

Step 2a If the meter was not accessible:

- Make sure the meter reader can access your meter at the next scheduled meter read (call the retailer to find out when that might be).
- You must make sure that the meter is accessible because when the meter is finally read, your retailer can recover from you the cost of your energy consumption for the whole period that the meter was inaccessible.

Step 2b If the meter is accessible:

Option 1:

- Ask to be billed based on an estimate.

When you receive a bill based on actual readings, there are rules on how far back the retailer can recover and the time you have to pay the bill.

Option 2:

- Wait, you will eventually receive a bill.

The bill may be high when it arrives, so make sure to budget for it.

Step 3 Whichever option you choose, when you receive your bill, here are some tips on what you should look for in the bill:

- an explanation of the amount being recovered and how it is calculated
- if the reason for not billing you is not due to your fault, the amount recovered should be no more than nine months from the date shown on the bill
- sufficient time to pay off what is owed (e.g. if your retailer is recovering eight months worth of your energy usage, you should be provided eight months to pay off what is owing).

If you find that the retailer is not doing any of the above, you can complain.

Find out how to make a complaint by going to www.yourchoice.vic.gov.au

Case studies

Customer received a bill after a year

Wilma didn't receive any bills from her energy retailer in 2013.

Finally, in January 2014, Wilma received a bill requiring payment within 14 business days.

Wilma is unhappy she has to pay such a high bill within a short timeframe.

Customer's rights

The Energy Retail Code requires retailers to bill all customers at least once every three months

Sometimes retailers encounter problems issuing bills at that frequency.

Possible causes of delayed billing include:

1. The retailer may be having issues with its billing system.
2. A problem with the distributors' IT system could have prevented the distributor from sending meter readings to retailers.

Whatever the reason for the delayed billing, once Wilma's retailer receives actual meter readings, **Clause 30 of the Energy Retail Code allows the retailer to back-bill Wilma:**

- Up to 9 months before the date on which they issue their back-bill if the retailer's billing system was wrongly set up, for instance. For Wilma, her retailer should only back-bill her from March 2013 to December 2013 (nine months)

Wilma is entitled to an explanation and:

- details of what's owing and how it's calculated
- an equal number of months to pay off what she owes.

As Wilma's retailer is requiring payment within 14 business days for a back-bill, her retailer is not complying with Clause 30 of the Energy Retail Code.

Case studies

Customer received a bill after a year (continued.)

What can customers do in this scenario?

1. Call your retailer to complain. A phone call may be all that is required to resolve your problem.

Tips

- Clearly explain the problem and remain polite throughout the conversation.
- Take notes of the call, including the date and the name of the customer service staff.

2. If the complaint is not resolved to your satisfaction, ask to speak to a senior staff member, such as the manager, or write to the retailer, addressing the letter to a senior manager.

Tips

- In the letter, clearly explain what the complaint is about and attach copies of any relevant documents.
- Let the retailer know of a specific outcome; Wilma can ask for nine months to pay off the bill.
- You should also ask for a response by a certain date.
- Keep copies of any correspondence with the retailer.

3. If you're not satisfied with the retailer's response, contact the Energy and Water Ombudsman, Victoria (EWOV). They can be contacted by:

- phone on 1800 500 509
- email at ewovinfo@ewov.com.au
- mail to Reply Paid 469, MELBOURNE VIC 8060
- using EWOV's complaints form at www.ewov.com.au

Useful Information

- **EWOV is a free and independent dispute resolution body which can investigate:**

- billing disputes
- the retailer's administration of credit and payment services in relation to a particular customer
- complaints related to disconnection, restriction and refundable advances.

- **EWOV cannot investigate complaints about:**

- prices, tariffs or the pricing structure
- Government policies, legislation, licences and codes.

More information about EWOV can be found at www.ewov.com.au